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THE ECONOMIC INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY. II.

V.

IN the preceding sections we have studied the genesis and the early formulation of the doctrine of historical materialism. Before proceeding to discuss its applications, it may be well to obviate some misunderstanding by directing attention to what might be called, not so much the modifications, as the further elaboration, of the theory.

In saying that the modes of production condition all social life, Marx sometimes leads us to believe that he refers only to the purely technical or technological modes of production. There are, however, abundant indications in his writings to show that he really had in mind the conditions of production in general.¹ This becomes especially important in discussing the earlier stages of civilization, where great changes occurred in the general relations of production, without much specific alteration in the technical processes. The younger Marxists have devoted much time and ability to the elucidation of this point.

In the first place, even though it is claimed that changes in technique are the causes of social progress, we must be careful not to take too narrow a view of the term. The adherents of the theory point out that, when we speak of technique in social life, we must include not only the technical processes of extracting the raw material and of fashioning it into a finished product, but also the technique of trade and transportation, the technical methods of business in general and the technical processes by which the finished product is distributed to the

¹ The criticisms of Masaryk, *Die philosophischen und sociologischen Grundlagen des Marxismus* (1899), pp. 99-100, and of Weisengrün, *Der Marxismus und das Wesen der sozialen Frage* (1900), p. 86, on this point are without foundation.

final consumer. Marx intimated this repeatedly, and Engels has stated it clearly in a letter, in which he sums up the ideas for which he and Marx contended :

We understand by the economic relations, which we regard as the determining basis of the history of society, the methods by which the members of a given society produce their means of support and exchange the products among each other, so far as the division of labor exists. The whole technique of production and of transportation is thus included. Furthermore, this technique, according to our view, determines the methods of exchange, the distribution of products and, hence, after the dissolution of gentile society, the division of society into classes, the relations of personal control and subjection, and thus the existence of the state, of politics, of law, *etc.* . . . Although technique is mainly dependent on the condition of science, it is still more true that science depends on the condition and needs of technique. A technical want felt by society is more of an impetus to science than ten universities.¹

The term technical must thus be broadened to include the whole series of relations between production and consumption. It is for this reason that we speak not so much of the technical interpretation of history—which would lead to misunderstanding—as of the economic interpretation of history.

The originators of the theory, moreover, go still further. When they speak of the materialistic or economic conception of history, they not only refuse to identify “economic” with “technical” in the narrow sense, but they do not even mean to

¹ “Unter den ökonomischen Verhältnissen, die wir als bestimmende Basis der Geschichte der Gesellschaft ansehen, verstehen wir die Art und Weise, worin die Menschen einer bestimmten Gesellschaft ihren Lebensunterhalt produzieren und die Produkte untereinander austauschen (soweit Teilung der Arbeit besteht). Also die gesamte Technik der Produktion und des Transports ist da einbegriffen. Diese Technik bestimmt nach unserer Auffassung auch die Art und Weise des Austausches, weiterhin die Verteilung der Produkte und damit, nach der Auflösung der Gentilgesellschaft, auch die Einteilung der Klassen, damit die Herrschafts- und Knechtschaftsverhältnisse, damit Staat, Politik, Recht, *etc.* Wenn die Technik, wie sie sagen, ja grösstenteils vom Stande der Wissenschaft abhängig ist, so noch weit mehr dieses vom Stande und den Bedürfnissen der Technik. Hat die Gesellschaft ein technisches Bedürfniss, so hilft das die Wissenschaft mehr voran als zehn Universitäten.”—Letter of 1894 in *Der sozialistische Akademiker* (1895), p. 373. Reprinted in L. Woltmann, *Der historische Materialismus* (1900), p. 248.

imply that "economic" excludes physical factors. It is obvious, for instance, that geographical conditions, to some degree and under certain circumstances, affect the facts of production. To the extent that Buckle pointed this out, he was in thorough accord with Marx; but the geographical conditions, as Marx has himself maintained, form only the limits within which the methods of production can act. While a change of geographical conditions may prevent the adoption of new methods of production, precisely the same geographical conditions are often compatible with entirely different methods of production. Thus, Marx tells us :

It is not the mere fertility of the soil, but the differentiation of the soil, the variety of its natural products, the changes of the seasons, which form the physical basis for the social division of labor, and which, by changes in the natural surroundings, spur man on to the multiplication of his wants, his capabilities, his means and modes of labor. It is the necessity of bringing a natural force under the control of society, of economizing, of appropriating or subduing it on a large scale by the work of man's hand, that first plays the decisive part in the history of industry.¹

He goes on to explain, however, that "favorable natural conditions alone give us only the possibility, never the reality," of definite economic methods of production and distribution of wealth. In the same way, Engels concedes that the geographical basis must be included in enumerating the economic conditions, but contends that its importance must not be exaggerated.

This is, however, by no means the most important elaboration of the theory. In the interval that elapsed between the first statement of the theory in the forties and the death of Marx the founders of the doctrine had little reason to moderate their statements. But after the death of Marx, and especially when the theory began to be actively discussed in the social-democratic congresses, the extreme claims of the orthodox Marxists began to arouse dissent, even in the ranks of the socialists themselves. Partly as a result of this, partly because

¹ Capital (English translation), p. 523.

of outside criticism, Engels now wrote a series of letters in which he endeavored to phrase his statement of the theory so as to meet some of the criticisms. In these letters¹ he maintained that Marx had often been misunderstood and that neither he himself nor Marx ever meant to claim an absolute validity for economic considerations to the exclusion of all other factors. He pointed out that economic actions are not only physical actions, but human actions, and that a man acts as an economic agent through the use of his head as well as of his hands. The mental development of man, however, is affected by many conditions; at any given time the economic action of the individual is influenced by his whole social environment, in which many factors have played a rôle. Engels confessed that Marx and he were "partly responsible for the fact that the younger men have sometimes laid more stress on the economic side than it deserves"; and he was careful to point out that the actual form of the social organization is often determined by political, legal, philosophical and religious theories and conceptions. In short, when we read the latest exposition of their views by one of the founders themselves, it almost seems as if the whole theory of economic interpretation had been thrown overboard.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that these concessions, undeniably significant as they are, involved in the minds of the leaders an abandonment of the theory. Engels continued to emphasize the fundamental significance of the economic life in the wider social life. The upholders of the doctrine remind us that, whatever be the action and reaction of social forces at any given time, it is the conditions of production, in the widest sense of the term, that are chiefly responsible for the basic permanent changes in the condition of society. Thus, Engels

¹ Engels's letters, written to various correspondents between 1890 and 1894, appeared originally in two newspapers, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (1895), no. 250, and *Der sozialistische Akademiker*, October 1 and 15, 1895. They have been reprinted, although not all of them in any one place, by Woltmann, *Der historische Materialismus* (1900), pp. 242-250; by Masaryk, *Die Grundlagen des Marxismus* (1899), pp. 104; by Mehring, *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, zweiter Theil* (2d ed.), p. 556; and by Greulich, *Ueber die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung* (1897), p. 7.

tells us that we must broaden our conception of the economic factor so as to include among the economic conditions, not only the geographical basis, but the actually transmitted remains of former economic changes, which have often survived only through tradition or *vis inertiae*, as well as the whole external environment of this particular form. He even goes so far as to declare the race itself to be an economic factor. And, while he still stoutly contends that the political, legal, religious, literary and artistic development rests on the economic, he points out that they all react upon one another and on the economic foundation.

It is not that the economic situation is the cause, in the sense of being the only active agent, and that everything else is only a passive result. It is, on the contrary, a case of mutual action on the basis of the economic necessity, which in last instance always works itself out.¹

A controversy that has arisen since Engels's death may serve to bring out the thought more clearly. A number of suggestive writers, of whom Gumpłowicz² is perhaps the most important, have attempted to explain some of the leading facts in human development by the existence of racial characteristics and race contests. Yet we now have an interesting work by a Frenchman, who does not even profess himself an advocate of the economic interpretation of history, maintaining, with some measure of success, that the majority of different racial characteristics are the results of socio-economic changes which

¹ "Ferner sind einbegriffen unter den ökonomischen Verhältnissen die geographische Grundlage, worauf diese sich abspielen, und die thatsächlich überlieferten Reste früherer ökonomischer Entwicklungsstufen, die sich forterhalten haben, oft nur durch Tradition oder *vis inertiae* natürlich auch das diese Gesellschaftsform nach aussen hin umgebende Milieu . . .

"Wir sehen die ökonomischen Bedingungen als das in letzter Instanz die geschichtliche Entwicklung Bedingende an. Aber die Rasse ist selbst ein ökonomischer Faktor. . . . Die politische, rechtliche, philosophische, religiöse, literarische, künstlerische, *etc.*, Entwicklung beruht auf der ökonomischen. Aber sie alle reagieren auch auf einander und auf der ökonomischen Basis. Es ist nicht, dass die ökonomische Lage Ursache, allein aktiv ist und alles andere nur passive Wirkung. Sondern es ist Wechselwirkung auf Grundlage der in letzter Instanz stets sich durchsetzenden ökonomischen Notwendigkeit. . . ."—Letter of 1894, *ibid.*

² Der Rassenkampf.

are themselves referable to physico-economic causes.¹ Demolins, the chief representative to-day of the school of LePlay, has — at least, so far as appears from his writings — never even heard of Marx or his theory, and we find in his work very little of the detail of the class conflict which primarily interested the socialists. But while Demolins reverts in essence to what might be called the commercio-geographical explanation of history, he is careful to point out how the conditions of physical life affect the methods and relations of production, and how these in turn are largely responsible for the differentiation of mankind into the racial types that have played a rôle in history. Thus, from his point of view, the race is largely an economic product, and we begin to understand what Engels meant when he declared the race itself to be an economic factor.

The theory of economic interpretation thus expounded by Engels must be considered authoritative. He tells us that Marx never really regarded the situation in any other light. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there are passages in Marx which seem to be more extreme, and which represent the doctrine in that cruder form which is so frequently met with among his uncritical followers. We are bound, however, to give him the benefit of the doubt; and we must not forget that when a new theory supposed to involve far-reaching practical consequences is first propounded, the apparent needs of the situation often result in an overstatement, rather than an understatement, of the doctrine.

We understand, then, by the theory of economic interpretation of history, not that all history is to be explained in economic terms alone, but that the chief considerations in human progress are the social considerations and that the important factor in social change is the economic factor. Economic interpretation of history means, not that the economic relations exert an exclusive influence, but that they exert a preponderant influence in shaping the progress of society.

¹ Edmond Demolins, *Comment la route crée le type social*, *Essai de géographie sociale*, n.d. (1901).

So much for a preliminary statement of the real content of the economic conception of history, as explained and elaborated by the founders themselves. In a subsequent section we shall revert to this point and attempt to analyze somewhat more closely the actual connection between the economic and the wider social relations of mankind.

VI.

Let us now proceed to study some of the applications that have been made of the theory of the economic interpretation of history. We can pursue this study without prejudicing the final decision as to the truth of the doctrine in its entirety. For it is obvious that we may refuse to admit the validity of the theory as a philosophical explanation of progress as a whole, and yet be perfectly prepared to admit that in particular cases the economic factor has played an important rôle. It is natural, however, that the economic influence in any given set of facts should be emphasized primarily by those whose general philosophical attitude would predispose them to search for economic causes. It will not surprise us, then, to find that much good work in this direction has been accomplished by the originators of the theory and their followers.

Marx himself made no mean contribution to the facts. Some of his statements are erroneous, and not a few of his historical explanations are farfetched and exaggerated; but there remains a considerable substratum of truth in his contributions to the subject. Of these contributions the most familiar is the account of the transition from feudal to modern society, due to the genesis in the seventeenth century of capital as a dominant industrial factor and to the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. It was Marx who first clearly pointed out the nature of the domestic system and its transformation into the factory system of our age, with the attendant change from the local to the national market and from this, in turn, to the world market. It was Marx, again, who called attention to the essential difference between the economic life

of classic antiquity and that of modern times, showing that, while capital played by no means an insignificant rôle in ancient times, it was commercial and not industrial capital, and that much of Greek and Roman history is to be explained in the light of this fact. It was Marx, too, who first disclosed the economic forces which were chiefly responsible for the political changes of the middle of the nineteenth century. And, finally, while Marx had originally devoted comparatively little attention to primitive civilization, we now know that in his manuscript notes he applied his doctrine in a suggestive way to the very first stages of social evolution.¹

It is perhaps in the early history of mankind that the most signal additions to our knowledge have been made by recent writers. The pioneer in this field was our great compatriot, Morgan. He was really the first to explain the early forms of human association and to trace society through the stages of the horde, the clan, the family and the state. Moreover, although he did not work it out in detail or give his theory any name, there is no doubt that he independently advanced the doctrine of the economic interpretation of history, without being aware of the fact that it applied to anything but the early stages. Because of the great neglect by subsequent writers of this part of Morgan's achievements, it is necessary to call attention to it at somewhat greater length.

Morgan starts out with the guarded statement that it is "probable that the great epochs of human progress have been identified more or less directly with the enlargement of the sources of subsistence."² The great epochs of which he speaks, however, cease, in his opinion, with the introduction of field agriculture.³ He discusses the assumption of original promiscuity in the human race and maintains that, while it probably existed at first, it is not likely that it was long continued in the horde, because the latter would break up into

¹ These notes are used by Engels in his *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (1884). See preface to first edition.

² Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1877). The following quotations are from the edition of 1878, p. 19. Cf. p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26

smaller groups for subsistence and fall into consanguine families.¹ In his treatment of the dependence of early man upon the physical characteristics of the food supply, he takes up in turn the early natural subsistence upon fruits and roots, the connection of fish subsistence with savagery and migration, the relations between the discovery of cereals, the cessation of cannibalism and the reliance on a meat and milk diet, the connection between the domestication of animals and pastoral society and, finally, the transition of what he calls horticulture into agriculture.² In all this we seem to be getting little beyond Buckle. What differentiates Morgan entirely from Buckle, however, is the fact that, while the latter confines himself to the simple problem of production, Morgan works out the influence of all these factors upon the social and political constitution and traces the transformation of society to changes in the form and conditions of property.

Although Morgan did not succeed in making thoroughly clear the economic causes of the early tracing of descent from the female line, he did call attention to the connection between the growth of private property and the evolution of the horde into the clan or, as he calls it, the gens.³ He elucidated still more clearly the causes of the change of descent from the female to the male line, showing how it went hand in hand with the extension of the institution of private property.⁴ The

¹ Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1877), p. 418.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 20-26. Morgan's "horticulture" is really the same as the "hoe-culture" which has recently been heralded by German writers, like Hahn and Schmoller, as a great discovery of their compatriots.

³ "With the institution of the gens came in the first great rule of inheritance which distributed the effects of a deceased person among his gentiles."—*Ibid.*, p. 528.

⁴ "After domestic animals began to be reared in flocks and herds, becoming thereby a source of subsistence as well as objects of individual property, and after tillage had led to the ownership of houses and lands in severalty, an antagonism would be certain to arise against the prevailing form of gentile inheritance, because it excluded the owner's children whose paternity was becoming more assured, and gave his property to his gentile kindred. A contest for a new rule of inheritance, shared in by the fathers and their children, would furnish a motive sufficiently powerful to effect the change. With property accumulating in masses, and assuming permanent forms, and with an increased proportion of it held by

account of the development of slavery¹ is perhaps not so novel; but the suggestion of an economic basis for the transition from the clan to the patriarchal family² and from the polygamic to the monogamic family³ was as striking as it was original.

While Morgan was in no way an economist and had probably never heard either of Marx or of the historical school of economics, his final conclusion as to the relations of private property to social welfare is in substantial agreement with modern views. He tells us that:

Since the advent of civilization the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property and define the relations of the state to the property it protects as well as the obligation and the limits of the rights of its owners. The interests of society are paramount to individual interests and the two must be brought into just and harmonious relations.⁴

The greater part of Morgan's *Ancient Society*, as well as of his other works,⁵ was, however, devoted to an account of the

individual ownership, descent in the female line was certain of overthrow, and the substitution of the male line equally assured. Such a change would leave the inheritance in the gens as before, but it would place children in the gens of their father and at the head of the agnatic kindred."—Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1877), pp. 345-346. Cf. p. 531.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 341 *et passim*.

² The patriarchal family is summed up as "an organization of servants and slaves under a patriarch for the care of flocks and herds, for the cultivation of lands and for mutual protection and subsistence. Polygamy was incidental."—*Ibid.*, p. 504. Cf. pp. 465-466.

³ "The growth of property and the desire for its transmission to children was in reality the moving power which brought in monogamy to insure legitimate heirs and to limit their number to the actual progeny of the married pair."—*Ibid.*, p. 477.

"As finally constituted, the monogamian family assured the paternity of children, substituted the individual ownership of real as well as of personal property for joint ownership, and an exclusive inheritance by children instead of agnatic inheritance."—*Ibid.*, p. 505. Cf. p. 389.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 552.

⁵ The League of the Iroquois (1849); Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family (1871); and Houses and House Life of the American Aborigines (1881).

historical facts, rather than of their economic causes. The controversy which at once sprang up in England, and which has lasted almost to the present time, turned well-nigh exclusively upon the first set of considerations. When scientists were not agreed upon the facts, it would seem useless to speculate about the causes of the facts. The trend given to the discussion by this early controversy is largely responsible for the fact that until very recently writers on sociology or social history have almost completely neglected the economic aspect of the transitions which they describe.¹ But, although some parts of Morgan's theory—like the details of the earliest consanguine family and the perhaps somewhat hasty generalization as to primitive promiscuity—have been modified, the substance of his account of the uterine or maternal clan and of its development into the tribe and the state, as well as of the dependence of the transition upon changes in the forms of property, have become incorporated into the accepted material of modern science.

It was not, however, until the German advocates of the economic interpretation of history took the matter up that Morgan's real importance was recognized. Engels published in 1884 his *Origin of the Family*, in which he showed that Morgan's views marked a distinct advance upon those of Bachofen and McLennan, and claimed that the English archæologists of the day had really adopted Morgan's theory without giving him credit. Turning from the account of the development to its causes, Engels accepted all of Morgan's conclusions as to the early uterine society and the development of monogamy, but carried them one step further by combining, as

¹ This is true of McLennan, Westermaarck, Starcke, Tyler, Lumholtz, Post and many others. It is true also, although to a somewhat less degree, of my honored colleague, Professor Giddings. Almost the only passage of importance for our purposes in his *Principles of Sociology* (1896) is the one on p. 266: "It seems to be an economic condition which in the lowest communities determines the duration of marriage and probably also the line of descent through mothers or fathers." Cf., however, in addition, pp. 276, 288 and 296. In a more recent article Professor Giddings substantially concedes that "these writers [Marx and his followers] may be held to have made good their main contention."—*International Monthly*, II (1900), 548.

he tells us, Morgan and Marx. Engels ascribed the transformation of gentile society to the first great social division of labor—the separation of pastoral tribes from the rest of society. This in itself gave rise to intertribal exchange as a permanent factor in economic life, and it was not long before intertribal exchange led to barter between individuals—a barter chiefly in cattle and natural products. With the transition from common to private property in such movables, the ground was prepared, on the one hand, for slavery and, on the other, for the downfall of the matriarchate. As private property increased we find the second great step in the division of labor—the separation of manual industry from agriculture. Exchange now becomes an exchange of commodities, and with the economic supremacy of the male there appear the patriarchate and then the monogamic family. Finally comes the third step in the division of labor—the rise of the merchant class, with the use of metallic money. The growth of capital, even if it be mercantile capital (as against the original cattle capital), ushers in a state of affairs with which the old gentile organization is no longer able to cope; and thus we find the origin of the political organization, the genesis of the state. In Greece, in Rome and in the Teutonic races of the early middle ages this transition is a matter of record; but no one before Morgan and Engels had been able to explain it intelligibly.

The hints thrown out by Morgan and Engels have been worked up by a number of writers, few of whom can be classed as socialists. At first the professed sociologists paid but little attention to the matter. With Kovalevsky, in 1890, we begin the series of those who attempted to prove a somewhat closer connection between the family and private property.¹ In 1896 Grosse devoted a separate volume to the subject² and brought out some new points as to the influence of economic conditions upon the character of the family, especially in the case of nomadic peoples and the early agriculturists. In the same

¹ Maxime Kovalevsky, "Tableau des origines et de l'évolution de la famille et de la propriété," *Skrifter utgifna af Lorenska Stiftelsen* (Stockholm, 1890).

² *Die Formen der Familie und die Formen der Wirthschaft* (1896).

year Professor Hildebrand published an admirable work on *Law and Custom in the Different Economic Stages*, in which, although not neglecting the earlier phases of social life, he laid the emphasis on the economic basis of the primitive agricultural community.¹ For the still earlier period noteworthy work has been done by Cunow. After having prepared the way by a study of the systems of consanguinity among the Australians² Cunow published in 1898 a series of articles on the economic basis of the matriarchate.³ He emphasized the essential weakness, from the historical point of view, of the ordinary classification into hunting, pastoral and agricultural stages.⁴ Beginning, however, with the hunting stage, Cunow maintains that the earliest form of organization rests on the supremacy of the man, which is not by any means the same thing as the supremacy of the father; for the polygamic or monogamic family which forms the basis of the patriarchal system was of much later development. In the early stages we may have a uterine society—that is, a tracing of descent through the mother—but we have no matriarchate.⁵ Cunow gives the economic reasons which explain this tracing of the descent through the female and shows how, under certain conditions, she becomes more sought after until finally she attains such an economic importance that the matriarchate itself develops.⁶ Incidentally he traces the connection between the female and early agriculture, and explains how her growing importance, both in and out of the home, exerted a decided influence upon

¹ Recht und Sitte auf den verschiedenen wirthschaftlichen Kulturstufen. Erster Theil (1896).

² Die Verbandschaftsorganisationen der Australneger (1894).

³ "Die ökonomischen Grundlagen der Mutterherrschaft," in *Die neue Zeit*, XVI, 1. A French version appeared in *Le Devenir social*, V (1898), 42, 146, 330, under the title, "Les Bases économiques du matriarcat."

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108. Cunow, however, does not remind us that all this had been pointed out in 1884 by Dargun in his admirable study, which is not so well known as it ought to be: "Ursprung und Entwicklungsgeschichte des Eigenthums," in the *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft*, V, especially pp. 59–61. Professor Giddings, in his article in the *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY* for June, 1901 (XVI, 204), alludes to the older theory as based on "the Mother-Goose philosophy of history." Dargun and Cunow are the writers who have emancipated us.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 176, 209.

the early division of labor. The matriarchate is shown very clearly to be largely an economic product.¹

In 1901 Cunow followed up his exposition by another series of essays on "The Division of Labor and the Rights of Women."² Here he points out the error of the usual statement that agriculture is a condition precedent to a disappearance of the nomadic life. On the contrary, maintains Cunow, a certain degree of stationary settled activity is a condition precedent to the transition to agriculture.³ Agriculture, however, may develop either out of the pastoral stage or out of the hunting stage, and in each case the activity of the female is of cardinal importance. The female is not only the primitive tiller of the soil, but also the creator of the earliest house industry, which plays such a distinctive rôle in primitive barter.⁴ The earliest division of labor rests on the principle that the female attends to the vegetable sustenance, the man to the animal diet, and on this fundamental distinction all the other social arrangements are built up. Marriage for a long time is not an ethical community of ideal interests, but very largely an economic or labor relation.⁵

Of much the same character as this investigation are the attempts made still more recently to supply an economic explanation for the origin of totemism⁶ and to study the economic causes of slavery. Especially on the latter topic our knowledge of the early conditions has been greatly increased by the detailed study of Nieboer.⁷ This writer, who accepts the theory of the

¹ Cunow, *op. cit.*, pp. 238, 241.

² "Arbeitsteilung und Frauenrecht; zugleich ein Beitrag zur materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung," in *Die neue Zeit*, XIX, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 180.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁶ Dr. Julius Pikler, *Der Ursprung des Totemismus; ein Beitrag zur materialistischen Geschichtstheorie* (Berlin, 1900). A somewhat different, but equally "materialistic," interpretation has been given by Frazer, in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1899, and by Professor Giddings, in a note on "The Origin of Totemism and Exogamy," in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XIV, 274.

⁷ Dr. H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System* (The Hague, 1900). See the review of this work in the *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*, September, 1901.

brilliant Italian economist Loria, has overturned many of the former notions on the subject and has studied slavery, not only, as most writers have done, in the agricultural stage of society, but also in the hunting, fishing and pastoral stages. Coming to the later period of classic antiquity, Ciccotti has shed considerable light on the origin and development of slavery in Greece, as well as in Rome, and has traced the connection between this fundamental fact and the entire political and social history.¹ Other writers, such as Francotte² and Pöhlmann,³ have considered more in detail the economic status of Greece and its influence on national and international conditions.

In the case of Roman history the relation between the land question and national progress has always been so obvious that such historians as Nitzsch and Mommsen did not have to wait for the rise of the school of economic interpretation. Even in the case of Rome, however, good work has since then been done, especially in the imperial period, in emphasizing the controlling influence of economic factors on the general development.⁴ So, also, some neglected points in the history of Hebrew antiquity have been brought out by writers like Beer and Mehring.⁵

When we come to more recent periods of history, there is an embarrassment of riches. The economic forces which were instrumental in shaping the transition from feudal to modern society are so obvious that the historians have for some time been laying stress on economic interpretation almost without

¹ Ettore Ciccotti: *Il Tramonto della schiavitù nel mondo antico* (Torino, 1899). The suggestive sketch of the whole topic by Eduard Meyer, in his address "Die Sklaverei im Alterthum" (1898), suffers in some important points from the fact that the well-known historian is only imperfectly acquainted with the results of recent economic studies.

² Francotte, *L'Industrie dans la Grèce ancienne* (1901).

³ Pöhlmann, *Geschichte des antiken Sozialismus und Communismus* (1901).

⁴ Cf. the series of essays by Paul Ernst on "Die sozialen Zustände im römischen Reiche vor dem Einfall der Barbaren," in *Die neue Zeit*, XI (1893), 2, and the suggestive book of Deloume, *Les Manieures d'argent à Rome* (1892).

⁵ M. Beer, "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Klassenkampfes im hebräischen Alterthum," *Die neue Zeit*, XI (1893), 1, p. 444. For similar studies by Kautsky and Lafargue, see Mehring, *Die Lessing-Legende*, p. 481.

knowing it. This is true, for instance, in the treatment of the military system, which has been clearly described by Bürkli in his account of the transition in Switzerland.¹ One of the most accomplished of Belgian historians, Des Marez, has recently voiced his conviction that

no one can investigate the deeper causes that have influenced the peoples between the Rhine and the North Sea without perceiving that it is above all the economic conditions, and not racial, linguistic or other factors, that have determined national progress.²

The newer view has led investigators to accentuate the economic factor not only in the Crusades³ but also in the Reformation with the victory of Calvinism and Puritanism.⁴ The professed historians themselves have been so far influenced by the movement that Lamprecht, one of the most distinguished of German scholars, has recently made the economic factor the very foundation of the entire political and social development of mediæval Germany.⁵ In the acrimonious discussion which this "audacious" move has engendered — a discussion not yet concluded — the gradual triumph of the newer tendency seems by no means improbable.⁶ When we approach the centuries nearer

¹ Karl Bürkli: *Der wahre Winkelried; die Taktik der alten Urschweizer* (1886). See especially pp. 143-184. Cf. also the same author's *Der Ursprung der Eidgenossenschaft aus der Markgenossenschaft und die Schlacht am Morgarten* (1891). In this monograph emphasis is laid on the economic origin of the Swiss democracy in general.

² G. Des Marez, *Les Luttes sociales en Flandre au moyen âge* (1900), p. 7.

³ Cf. the article by Prutz, "The Economic Development of Western Europe under the Influence of the Crusades," *The International Monthly*, IV (August, 1901), 2, p. 251.

⁴ See especially Engels, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*; Bernstein's essay on "The Socialistic Currents during the English Revolution," in *Die Geschichte des Sozialismus in Einzeldarstellungen*, I, 2, and published as a separate work under the title, *Communistische und demokratisch-socialistische Strömungen in der englischen Revolution des XVII. Jahrhunderts* (1895); and Belfort Bax's study on the Social Side of the German Reformation, of which two volumes have thus far appeared.

⁵ Lamprecht, *Deutsche Geschichte*.

⁶ Lamprecht's general views may be found in his *Alte und neue Richtung in der Geschichtswissenschaft* and *Was ist Kulturgeschichte?* (1896). A list of some recent articles on the controversy may be found in Ashley, *Surveys Historic and Economic*, p. 29. To these may now be added the article of Below in the

our own time, it has almost become a commonplace to explain in economic terms the political transition of England in the eighteenth century, as well as the French and American revolutions. To take only a few examples from more recent events, it is no longer open to doubt that the democracy of the nineteenth century is largely the result of the industrial revolution; that the entire history of the United States to the Civil War was at bottom a struggle between two economic principles; that the Cuban insurrection against Spain, and thus indirectly the Spanish-American War, was the outcome of the sugar situation; or, finally, that the condition of international politics is at present dominated by economic considerations. Wherever we turn in the maze of recent historical investigation, we are confronted by the overwhelming importance attached by the younger and abler scholars to the economic factor in political and social progress.

VII.

We come now to the most important part of the subject — a consideration, namely, of the objections that have been urged to the doctrine here under discussion. Some of these objections, as we shall learn later, are indeed weighty, but others possess only a partial validity. Yet the emphasis is commonly put by the critics of economic interpretation on the weak, rather than on the sound, arguments. It will be advisable, then, to consider first and at greater length some of these alleged objections, reserving for later treatment those criticisms which possess greater force.

Among the criticisms commonly advanced, the more usual may be summarized as follows: First, that the theory of economic interpretation is a fatalistic theory, opposed to the doctrine of free will and overlooking the importance of great men in history; second, that it rests on the assumption of

Historische Zeitschrift, LXXXVI (1900), 1. Perhaps the most striking work of this nature that has been accomplished by an American scholar is the article of E. V. D. Robinson, "War and Economics in History and Theory," *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*, XV (1900), 581-586.

"historical laws" the very existence of which is open to question; third, that it is socialistic; fourth, that it neglects the ethical and spiritual forces in history; fifth, that it leads to absurd exaggerations.

It will be observed that these criticisms fall into two categories. The one category takes exception, not only to the economic interpretation of history, but to the general social interpretation of history. The other class of objections does not deny that the controlling forces of progress are social in character, but contends that we must not confound economic with social considerations and that the economic factor is of no more importance than any of the other social factors. In the above list the first and second criticisms are to be included in the former category; the third and the fifth in the latter; while the fourth criticism is so broad that it falls partly in each category.

We begin with the first class of criticisms because some writers think that they are triumphantly refuting the economic interpretation of history, when they are in reality directing their weapons against a far more comprehensive structure of ideas, which very few of the opponents of the economic interpretation of history would like to see demolished. Let us consider, then, the objection that the doctrine is fatalistic, that it is opposed to the theory of free will and that it overlooks the importance of great men in history.

It is obvious that this is not the place to enter into a general philosophical discussion of determinism. For our purposes it is sufficient to state that, if by freedom of the will we simply mean the power to decide as to an action, there is no necessary clash with the doctrine of economic or social interpretation. The denial of this statement involves a fallacy, which in its general aspects has been neatly hit off by Huxley:

Half the controversies about the freedom of the will . . . rest upon the absurd presumption that the proposition "I can do as I like" is contradictory to the doctrine of necessity. The answer is; nobody doubts that, at any rate within certain limits, you can do as you like. But what determines your likings and dislikings? . . . The passionate

assertion of the consciousness of their freedom, which is the favorite refuge of the opponents of the doctrine of necessity, is mere futility, for nobody denies it. What they really have to do, if they would upset the necessarian argument, is to prove that they are free to associate any emotion whatever with any idea however; to like pain as much as pleasure; vice as much as virtue; in short, to prove that, whatever may be the fixity of order of the universe of things, that of thought is given over to chance.¹

In other words, every man has will power and may decide to act or to refrain from acting, thus showing that he is in this sense a free agent. But whether he decides in the one way or the other, there are certain causes operating within the organism which are responsible for the decision. The function of science is to ascertain what these causes are. All that we know thus far is that every man is what he is because of the influence of environment, past or present. We need not here enter into the biological disputes between the Weissmannist and the Neo-Lamarckian; for, whether we believe, with the one, that the only factor in progress is the power of natural selection to transmit and strengthen congenital characteristics or, with the other, that acquired characteristics are also inherited, we are dealing in each case with the operation of some form of past environment. Neither Weissmanists nor Neo-Lamarckians deny the obvious fact of the influence of present environment on the individual, as such.

Since, therefore, man, like everything else, is what he is because of his environment, past and present, — that is, the environment of his ancestors, as well as his own, — it is clear that, if we knew all the facts of his past and present environment, we should be in a much better position to foretell with some degree of precision the actions of every human being. Although a man is free to steal or not to steal, we are even now safe in predicting that under ordinary circumstances an honest man will not steal. His congenital and acquired characteristics are such that under certain conditions he will always

¹ Hume, with *Helps to the Study of Berkeley*, ch. x, in *Huxley's Collected Essays*, vol. vi, p. 220.

elect a certain course of action. In the case of physical environment the matter is very simple. While an Eskimo may be perfectly free to go naked, it is not a violent stretch of the fancy to assume that no sane Eskimo will do so as long as he remains in the Arctic regions. When we leave the physical and come to the social environment, as we necessarily do in discussing the doctrine of economic interpretation, the essence of the matter is not much changed.

The theory of social environment, reduced to its simplest elements, means that, even though the individual be morally and intellectually free to choose his own action, the range of his choices will be largely influenced by the circumstances, traditions, manners and customs of the society about him. I may individually believe in polygamy and may be perfectly free to decide whether to take one or two wives ; but if I live outside of Utah, the chances are very great that I shall be so far guided in my decision by the law and social custom as to content myself with one spouse. The common saying that a man's religion is formed for him affords another illustration. The son of a Mohammedan may elect to become a Christian, but it is safe to predict that for the immediate future the vast majority of Turks will remain Mohammedans.

The negation of the theory of social environment excludes the very conception of law in the moral disciplines. It would render impossible the existence of statistics, jurisprudence, economics, politics, sociology or even ethics. For what do we mean by a social law? Social law means that, amid the myriad decisions of the presumable free agents that compose a given community, there can be discovered a certain general tendency or uniformity of action, deviation from which is so slight as not to impair the essential validity of the general statement. In a race of cannibals the abstention by any one savage from human flesh will not influence the history of that tribe ; in the present industrial system the offer on the part of any one employer to double the customary wages of his workmen will have no appreciable effect upon the general relations of labor and capital. The controlling considerations are always the

social considerations. At bottom, of course, the individual is the unit ; and every individual may be conceived as — ideally, at least — a free agent. But for individuals living in society the theories that influence progress are the social choices, that is, the choices of the majority. The decision of any one individual is important only to the extent that his influence preponderates with the great majority ; and then it is no longer an individual judgment, but becomes that of the majority.¹

This is the reason why the “great man theory” of history has well-nigh disappeared. No one, indeed, denies the value of great men or the vital importance of what Matthew Arnold calls the remnant. Without the winged thoughts and the decisive actions of the great leaders the progress of the world would doubtless have been considerably retarded. But few now overlook the essential dependence of the great man upon the wider social environment amid which he has developed.² Aristotle, the greatest thinker of antiquity, defended slavery because slavery was at the time an integral part of the whole fabric of Greek civilization. A Jefferson would be as impossible in Turkey as a Pobyedonostseff in the United States. Pheidias is as unthinkable in China as Lionardo in Canada. On the other hand, the effects ascribed to great men are often largely the result of forces of which they were only the chance vehicles. Cæsar erected the Roman Empire, but the empire would undoubtedly have come ultimately with or without Cæsar. Napoleon for the time transformed the face of Europe, but the France of to-day would in all probability have been in its essentials the same had Napoleon never lived. Washington and Lincoln assuredly exercised the most profound influence on their times, but it is scarcely open to doubt

¹ For an application of this doctrine to the theory of economics, see an article by the present writer on “Social Elements in the Theory of Value” in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (June, 1901).

² In his interesting essay on “Great Men and their Environment” Professor William James says many things which command assent, especially in connection with the geographical interpretation of history. But he misses the main point, although he hints at it on pp. 226–227. See *The Will to believe and Other Essays* (1897).

that in the end the Revolution would have succeeded and the Rebellion would have failed, even though Washington and Lincoln had never existed.

While his appearance at a particular moment appears to us a matter of chance, the great man influences society only when society is ready for him. If society is not ready for him, he is called, not a great man, but a visionary or a failure. Just as in animal life the freak or sport works through natural selection as fixed by the environment, so in human life the great man can permanently succeed only if the social environment is ripe. Biologists tell us that variation in the species is the cause of all progress, but that the extreme limit of successful variation from the parent type in any one case does not exceed a small percentage. The great man represents the extreme limit of successful variation in the human race. It is to him that progress seems to be, and in fact often is, in large measure due. But we must not forget that even then the great mass of his characteristics are those of the society about him, and that he is great because he visualizes more truly than any one else the fundamental tendencies of the community in which his lot is cast, and because he expresses more successfully than others the real spirit of the age of which he is the supreme embodiment.¹

It is, therefore, an obviously incorrect statement of the problem to assert that the theory of economic interpretation, or the theory of social environment of which it is a part, is incompatible with the doctrine of free will. If by determinism we erroneously mean moral fatalism, determinism is not involved at all.² The theory of social environment in no way implies fatalism. Social arrangements are human arrangements,

¹ An interesting attempt to study in detail the causes of the appearance of great men in a particular country and a particular field has been made by Professor A. Odin, of the University of Sofia, in his two-volume work, *Génèse des Grands Hommes* (1895). The author devotes himself specifically to the great men in French literature, concluding that the social and economic environment, not the force of heredity or chance, is the capital factor in the phenomenon.

² The passage sometimes quoted from Marx, *Das Kapital*, III, 2, p. 355, does not refer to the general problem of determinism, as Masaryk (*Grundlagen des Marxismus*, p. 232) seems to think, but to freedom in the sense of liberation from the necessity of working all day in the factory and having no time for self-improvement.

and human beings are, in the sense indicated, free to form decisions and to make social choices; but they will invariably be guided in their decisions by the sum of ideas and impressions which have been transmitted to them through inheritance and environment. So far as great men influence the march of progress, they can do so only to the extent that they can induce the community to accept these new ideas as something in harmony with their surroundings and their aspirations. Given a certain set of conditions, the great mass of the community will decide to act in a certain way. Social law rests on the observation that men will choose a course of action in harmony with what they conceive to be their welfare, and on the further observation that the very idea of an organized community implies that a majority will be found to entertain common ideas of what is their welfare. If the conditions change, the common ideas will change with them. The conditions, so far as they are social in character, are indeed created by men and may be altered by men, so that in last resort there is nothing fatalistic about progress.¹ But it is after all the conditions which, because of their direct action or reaction on individuals, are at any given moment responsible for the general current of social thought.

To the extent, then, that the theory of economic interpretation is simply a part of the general doctrine of social environment, the contention that it necessarily leads to an unreasoning fatalism is baseless. Men are the product of history, but history is made by men.²

¹ It is impossible to speak in any but respectful terms of Professor James. The limits of our toleration, however, are well-nigh reached when we find such an extreme statement as this: "I cannot but consider the talk of the contemporary sociological school about averages and general causes the most pernicious and immoral of fatalisms." — See the chapter on "The Importance of Individuals," in *The Will to Believe*, p. 262. This apparently shows an egregious misconception of the very nature of social law.

² Those interested in the discussion of this point by the socialists may be referred to the articles of Kautsky, Bernstein and Mehring in *Die neue Zeit*, XVII (1899), 2, pp. 4, 150, 268 and 845. Engels has also touched upon it several times, in his *Anti-Dühring*, in his *Ludwig Feuerbach* (2d ed., 1895), p. 44, and more fully in his letter of 1894 published in *Der sozialistische Akademiker* (1895), p. 373, and reprinted in Woltmann, *Der historische Materialismus*, p. 250.

The second objection to the theory under discussion is closely related to the first. The economic interpretation of history presupposes that there are historical laws. Yet this is demurred to by some.

Those, however, who deny the existence of historical laws are evidently laboring under a misapprehension. What they obviously mean is that the statement of some particular historical law is false or that the causes of some definite historical occurrence are so complex and so obscure that it is well-nigh impossible to frame a general explanation. But they cannot mean that historical laws do not exist. The mere fact that we have not discovered a law does not prove that there is none.

For what is meant by a scientific law? A law is an explanatory statement of the actual relations between facts. The processes of human thought enable us to classify the likenesses and differences in the myriad phenomena of life, and to subsume the unity underlying these differences. This unity makes itself known to us under the guise of a causal relation of one phenomenon to another. When we have succeeded in ascertaining the relation of cause and effect, we are able to frame the law. But our inability to discover the law does not invalidate the fact of its existence. The relations between the stars existed from the beginning of time; the discovery of the law which enables us to explain these relations is a result of scientific progress.¹

What is true of the exact sciences is equally true of the social sciences, with the difference that the social sciences are immeasurably more complex because of the greater difficulty in isolating the phenomena to be investigated and in repeating the experiments. But to deny the existence of social laws, for instance, simply because some particular alleged laws may be

¹ This does not, of course, imply that the law possesses an objective existence apart from our apperceptions. A consideration of this problem belongs to the science of epistemology. The questions of the "Ding an sich" and of the necessary limits of human thought have no place in this discussion; nor have they any bearing upon the particular objection here alluded to. For the contention in question is not that historical laws have no objective existence, but that there is no possibility of our framing an adequate explanation of causal relations.

convicted of unreality would be to repeat the errors formerly committed by some of the extremists among the historical economists and not yet so infrequent as they ought to be. Obedience to law does not mean that the law causes the phenomenon to happen,—for that is absurd,—but simply that the law affords an explanation of the occurrence.

History, however, is the record of the actions of men in society. It is not alone past politics, as Freeman said: it is past economics, and past ethics, and past jurisprudence, and past every other kind of social activity. But if each phase of social activity constitutes the material for a separate science, with its array of scientific laws, the whole of social activity, which in its ceaseless transformation forms the warp and woof of history, must equally be subject to law. All social activity may be regarded from the point of view of the coexistence of phenomena or from that of the sequence of phenomena. In the one case we arrive at the static laws, in the other at the dynamic laws. The laws of history are the dynamic laws of the social sciences or of the social science *par excellence*. To deny the existence of historical laws is to maintain that there is to be found in human life no such thing as cause and effect.

The third objection to the doctrine is its alleged socialistic character. To this it may be replied that, if the theory is true, it is utterly immaterial to what conclusion it leads. To refuse to accept a scientific law because some of its corollaries are distasteful to us is to betray a lamentable incapacity to grasp the elementary conditions of scientific progress. If the law is true, we must make our views conform to the law, not attempt to mould the law to our views.

Fortunately, however, we are not reduced to any such alternative. For, notwithstanding the ordinary opinion to the contrary, there is nothing in common between the economic interpretation of history and the doctrine of socialism, except the accidental fact that the originator of both theories happened to be the same man. Karl Marx founded "scientific socialism," if by that curious phrase we mean his theory of

surplus value and the conclusions therefrom. Karl Marx also originated the economic interpretation of history and thought that his own version of this interpretation would prove to be a bulwark of his socialistic theory. And most of his followers have thought likewise. Thus, Mehring tells us that "historical idealism in its various theological, rationalistic and materialistic manifestations is the conception of history of the bourgeois class, as historical materialism is that of the laboring class."¹

It is plain, however, that the two things have nothing to do with each other. We might agree that economic factors primarily influence progress; we might conclude that social forces, rather than individual whim, at bottom make history; we might perhaps even accept the existence of class struggles; but none of these admissions would necessarily lead to any semblance of socialism. Scientific socialism teaches that private property in capital is doomed to disappear; the economic interpretation of history calls attention, among other things, to the influence which private capital has exerted on progress. The vast majority of economic thinkers to-day believe, as a result of this historical study, that the principle of private property is a logical and salutary result of human development, however much they may be disposed to emphasize the need of social control. The neo-Marxists themselves — such as Bernstein, for instance — disagree with Marx's view as to the immediate future of the class struggle and consider that his doctrine of the "impending cataclysm of capitalistic society" has been disproved by the facts of the half century which has intervened since the theory was propounded. Yet Bernstein would not for a moment abandon his belief in the economic interpretation of history, as we have described it.²

In fact, the socialistic application of the economic interpretation of history is exceedingly naïve. If history teaches anything at all, it is that the economic changes transform society

¹ Die Lessing-Legende, p. 500.

² In his most recent book Bernstein speaks of the "realistische Geschichtsbetrachtung die in ihren Hauptzügen unwiderlegt geblieben ist." — Zur Geschichte und Theorie des Sozialismus (2d ed., 1901), p. 285.

by slow and gradual steps. It took centuries for feudal society to develop; it took centuries for private capital to convert feudalism into modern industrial society. The characteristic mark of the modern factory system, still in its infancy, is the predominance of the individual or corporate entrepreneur on a huge scale, as we see it typified in the present trust movement in America. To suppose that private property and private initiative, which are the very secrets of the whole modern movement, will at once give way to the collective ownership which forms the mistaken ideal of the socialists, is to shut one's eyes to the significance of actual facts and to the teachings of history itself.¹ Rodbertus was at least more logical than Marx when he asserted that the triumph of socialism would be a matter of the dim future.

Socialism is a theory of what ought to be; historical materialism is a theory of what has been. The one is teleological; the other is descriptive. The one is a speculative ideal;² the other is a canon of interpretation. It is impossible to see any necessary connection between such divergent conceptions. We must distinguish between the principle of economic interpretation in general and some particular application of the principle. We might agree with the general doctrine and yet refuse to accept the somewhat fanciful ideals of the non-socialist Loria; we might agree with the general doctrine and yet refuse to accept the equally fanciful ideals of the socialist Marx. Even if every one of Marx's economic theories was entirely false, this fact alone would not in any degree invalidate the general doctrine of economic interpretation. It is perfectly possible to be the staunchest individualist and at the same time an ardent advocate of the doctrine of economic interpretation. In fact, the writers who are to-day making the most successful application of economic interpretation are

¹ Marx, indeed, in one passage predicts the formation of trusts. But he, as well as his followers, overlooks the fact that concentrated capital, like separated capital, can do its best work only under the lash of individual initiative and personal responsibility.

² The "scientific socialists" deny this, but in vain.

not socialists at all. Socialism and "historical materialism" are at bottom entirely independent conceptions.

But while socialism and "historical materialism" are thus in no way necessarily connected, it does not follow that they may not both be equally erroneous. All that we have attempted to prove here is that the falsity of socialism does not, of and in itself, connote the falsity of economic interpretation. The fact that one argument is bad does not imply that other arguments are good. The validity of the economic interpretation of history is still open to question and cannot be decided until after a study of other and far more important considerations.

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(To be continued.)